Another ARSENE LUPIN Story

"'Everything about her gives me that thrill. • • • Her movements, her repose, her silence and her voice!'"

"The Hollow Needle"

By Maurice Leblanc

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CHAPTER I.

The Shot.

RAYMONDE listened. The noise was repeated twice over, clearly enough to be distinguished from the medley of vague sounds that formed the great silence of the night and yet too faintly to enable her to tell whether it was near or far, within the walls of the big country-house, or outside, among the murky recesses of the park.

She rose softly. Her window was half open; she flung it back wide. The moonlight lay over a peaceful landscape of lawns and chickets, against which the straggling ruins of the old abbey stood out in tragic outlines, truncated columns, mutilated arches, fragments of porches and shreds of flying buttresses. A light breeze hovered over the face of things, gliding noiselessly through the bare, motionless branches of the trees, but shaking the tiny budding leaves of the shrubs.

And, suddenly, she heard the same sound again. It was on the left and on the floor below her, in the living rooms, therefore, that occupied the left wing of the house. Brave and plucky though she was, the girl felt afraid. She slipped on her dressing gown and took the matches.

"Raymonde—Raymonde!"

A voice low as a breath was calling to her from the next room, the door of which had not been closed. She was feeling her way there, when Suzanne, her cousin, came out of the room and fell into her arms:

"Raymonde—is that you? Did you hear?"—

"Yes. So you're not asleep?"

"I suppose the dog woke me—some time ago. But he's not barking now. What time is it?"

"About four."

"Listen! Surely, some one's walking in the drawing room!"

"There's no danger, your father is down there, Suzanne."

"But there is danger for him. His room is next to the boudoir."

"M. Daval is there, too"—

"At the other end of the house. He could never hear."

They hesitated, not knowing what course to decide upon. Should they call out? Cry for help? They dared not; they were frightened of the sound of their own voices. But Suzanne, who had gone to the window, suppressed a scream:

"Look!—A man!—Near the fountain!"

A man was walking away at a rapid pace. He carried under his arm a fairly large load, the nature of which they were unable to distinguish; it knocked against his leg and impeded his progress. They saw him pass near the ness below them came the sound of a struggle, a crash of furniture overturned, words, exclamations and then, horrible and ominous, a hoarse groan, the gurgle of a man who is being murdered.

Raymonde leaped toward the door. Suzanne clung desperately to her arm.

"No—no—don't leave me—I'm frightened"—

Raymonde pushed her aside and darted down the corridor, followed by Suzanne, who staggered from wall to wall, screaming as she went. Raymonde reached the staircase, flew down the stairs, flung herself upon the door of the big drawing room and stopped short, rooted to the threshold, while Suzanne sank in a heap by her side. Facing them at three steps' distance stood a man with a lantern in his hand. He turned it upon the two girls, blinding them with the light, stared long at their pale faces, and then, without hurrying, with the calmest movements in the world, took his cap, picked up a scrap of paper and two bits of straw, removed some footmarks from the carpet, went to the balcony, turned to the girls, made them a deep bow and disappeared.

Suzanne was the first to run to the little boudoir which separated the big drawing room from her father's bedroom. But at the entrance a hideous sight appalled her. By the slanting rays of the moon she saw two apparently lifeless bodies lying close to each other on the floor. She leaned over one of them.

"Father! Father! Is it you? What has happened to you?" she cried distractedly.

After a moment the Comte de Gesvres moved. In a broken voice he said:

"Don't be afraid. I am not wounded. Daval? Is he alive? The knife? The knife?"—

Two men servants now arrived with candles. Raymonde flung herself down before the other body and recognized Jean Daval, the Count's private secretary. A little stream of blood trickled from his neck. His face already wore the pallor of death.

Then she rose, returned to the drawing room, took a gun that hung in a trophy of arms on the wall and went out on the balcony. Not more than fifty or sixty seconds had elapsed since the man had set his foot on the top rung of the ladder. He could not, therefore, be very far away, the more so as he had taken the precaution to remove the ladder, in order to prevent the inmates of the house from using it. And soon she saw him skirting the remains of the old cloister. She put the gun to her shoulder, calmly took aim and fired. The man fell.

"That's done it! That's done it!" said one of the servants. "We've got this one. I'll run down."

"No, Victor, he's getting up. You had better go down by the staircase and make straight for the little door in the wall. That's the only way he can escape."

Victor hurried off, but, before he reached the park, the man fell down again. Raymonde called the other servant:

"Albert, do you see him down there? Near the main cloister?"—

"Yes, he's crawling in the grass. He's done for"—

"Watch him from here."

"There's no way of escape for him. On the right of the ruins is the open lawn"—

"And, Victor, do you guard the door on the left," she said, taking up her gun.

"But, surely, you are not going down, miss?"

"Yes, yes," she said, with a resolute accent and abrupt movements; "let me be—I have a cartridge left—if he stirs"—

She went out. A moment later Albert saw her going toward the ruins. He called to her from the window:

"He's dragged himself behind the cloister. I can't see him. Be careful, miss"—

Raymonde went round the old cloisters to cut off the man's retreat, and Albert soon lost sight of her. After a few minutes, as he did not see her return, he became uneasy and, keeping his eye on the ruins, instead of going down by the stairs, he made an effort to reach the ladder. When he had succeeded he scrambled down and ran straight to the cloisters near which he had seen the man last. Thirty paces further he found Raymonde, who was searching with Victor.

"Well?" he asked.

"There's no laying one's hands on him," replied Victor.

"The little door?"

"I've been there; here's the key."

"Still—he must"—

"Oh, we've got him safe enough, the scoundrel. He'll be ours in ten minutes."

The farmer and his son, awakened by the shot, now came from the farm buildings, which were at some distance on the right, but within the circuit of the walls. They had met no one.

"Of course not," said Albert. "The ruffian can't have left the ruins. We'll dig him out of some hole or other."

They organized a methodical search, beating every bush, pulling aside the heavy masses of ivy rolled round the shafts of the columns. They made sure that the chapel was properly locked and that none of the panes were broken. They went round the cloisters and examined every nook and corner. The search was fruitless.

There was but one discovery: at the place where the man had fallen under Raymonde's gun they picked up a chauffeur's cap, in very soft buff leather; besides that, nothing.

The gendarmerie of Ouville-la-Riviere were informed at 6 o'clock in the morning and at once proceeded to the spot, after sending an express to the authorities at Dieppe with a note describing the circumstances of the crime, the imminent capture of the chief criminal and "the discovery of his headgear and of the dagger with which the crime had been committed."

At 10 o'clock two hired conveyances came down the gentle slope that led to the house. One of them, an old-fashioned calash, contained the deputy public prosecutor and the examining Magistrate, accompanied by his clerk. In the other, a humble fly, were seated two reporters, representing the Journal de Rouen and a great Paris paper.

The old chateau came into view—once the abbey residence of the priors of Ambrumesy, mutilated under the Revolution, both restored by the Comte de Gesvres, who had now owned it for some twenty years. It consists of a main building, surmounted by a pinnacled clock-tower and two wings, each of which is surrounded by a flight of steps with a stone balustrade. Looking across the walls of the park and beyond the upland supported by the high Norman cliffs, you catch a glimpse of the blue line of the Channel between the villages of Sainte-Marguerite and Varengeville.

Here the Comte de Gesvres lived with his daughter Suzanne, a delicate, fair-haired, pretty creature, and his niece, Raymonde de Saint-Veran, whom he had taken to live with him two years before, when the simultaneous death of her father and mother left Raymonde an orphan. Life at the chateau was peaceful and regular. A few neighbors paid an occasional visit. In the summer the Count took the two girls almost every day to Dieppe. He was a tall man, with a handsome, serious face and hair that was turning gray. He was very rich, managed his fortune himself and looked after his extensive estates with the assistance of his secretary, Jean Daval.

Immediately upon his arrival the examining magistrate took down the first observations of Sergt. Quevillon of the gendarmes. The capture of the criminal, imminent though it might be, had not yet been effected, but every outlet of the park was held. Escape was impossible.

The little company next crossed the chapter-hall and the refectory, both of which are on the ground floor, and went up to the first story. They at once remarked the perfect order that prevailed in the drawing room. Not a piece of furniture, not an ornament but appeared to occupy its usual place; nor was there any gap among the ornaments or furniture. On the right and left walls hung magnificent Flemish tapestries with figures. On the panels of the wall facing the windows were four fine canvases, in contemporary frames, representing mythological scenes. These were the famous pictures by Rubens which had been left to the Comte de Gesvres, together with the Flemish tapestries, by his maternal uncle, the Marques de Bobadilla, a Spanish grandee.

M. Filleul remarked:

"If the motive of the crime was theft, this drawing room, at any rate, was not the object of it."

"You can't tell!" said the deputy, who spoke little, but who, when he did, invariably opposed the magistrate's views.

"Why, my dear sir, the first thought of a burglar would be to carry off those pictures and tapestries, which are universally renowned."

"Perhaps there was no time."

"We shall see."

At that moment, the Comte de Gesvres entered, accompanied by the doctor. The count, who did not seem to feel the effects of the attack to which he had been subjected, welcomed the two officials. Then he opened the door of the boudoir.

This room, which no one had been allowed to enter since the discovery of the crime, differed from the drawing room inasmuch as it presented a scene of the greatest disorder. Two chairs were overturned, one of the tables smashed to pieces and several objects—a travelling clock, a portfolio, a box of stationery—lay on the floor. And there was blood on some of the scattered pieces of note-paper.

The doctor turned back the sheet that covered the corpse. Jean Daval, dressed in his usual velvet suit, with a pair of nailed boots on his feet, lay stretched on his back, with one arm folded beneath him. His collar and tie had been removed and his shirt opened, revealing a large wound in the chest.

"Death must have been instantaneous," declared the doctor. "One blow of the knife was enough."

"It was no doubt the knife which I saw on the drawing-room mantelpiece, next to a leather cap?" said the examining magistrate.

"Yes," said the Comte de Gesvres, "the knife was picked up here. It comes from the same trophy in the drawing-room from which my niece, Mlle. de Saint-Veran, snatched the gun. As for the chauffeur's cap, that evidently belongs to the murderer."

M. Filleul examined certain further details in the room, put a few questions to the doctor and then asked M. de Gesvres to tell him what he had seen and heard. The count worded his story as follows:

"Jean Daval woke me up. I had been sleeping badly, for that matter, with gleams of consciousness in which I seemed to hear noises, when, suddenly opening my eyes, I saw Daval standing at the foot of my bed, with his candle in his hand and fully dressed—as he is now, for he often worked late into the night. He seemed greatly excited and said, in a low voice: 'There's some one in the drawing-room.' I heard a noise myself, I got up and softly pushed the door leading to this boudoir. At the same moment, the door over there, which opens into the big drawing-room, was thrown back and a man appeared who leaped at me and stunned me with a blow on the temple. I am telling you this without any details, Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction, for the simple reason that I remember only the principal facts, and that these facts followed upon one another with extraordinary swiftness."

"And after that?"

"After that, I don't know—I fainted. When I came to, Daval lay stretched by my side, mortally wounded."

"At first sight, do you suspect no one?"

"No one."

"You have no enemy?"

"I know of none."

"Nor M. Daval either?"

"Daval! An enemy? He was the best creature that ever lived. M. Daval was my secretary for twenty years and, I may say, my confidant; and I have never seen him surrounded by anything but love and friendship."

"Still, there has been a burglary and there has been a murder; there must be a motive for all that."

"The motive? Why, it was robbery pure and simple."

"Robbery? Have you been robbed of something, then?"

"No, nothing."

"In that case?"

"In that case, if they have stolen nothing and if nothing is missing, they at least took something away."

"What?"

"I don't know. But my daughter and my niece will tell you, with absolute certainty, that they saw two men in succession cross the park, and that those two men were carrying fairly heavy loads."

"The young ladies"—

"The young ladies may have been dreaming, you think? I should be tempted to believe it, for I have been exhausting myself in inquiries and suppositions ever since this morning. However, it is easy enough to question them."

The two cousins were sent for to the big drawing-room. Suzanne, still quite pale and trembling, could hardly speak. Raymonde, who was more energetic, more of a man, better looking, too, with the golden glint in her brown eyes, described the events of the night and the part which she had played in them.

(To Be Continued.)

"Soon she saw him. • • • She put the gun to her shoulder, calmly took aim and fired. The man fell."

Let George Do It!

By George McManus

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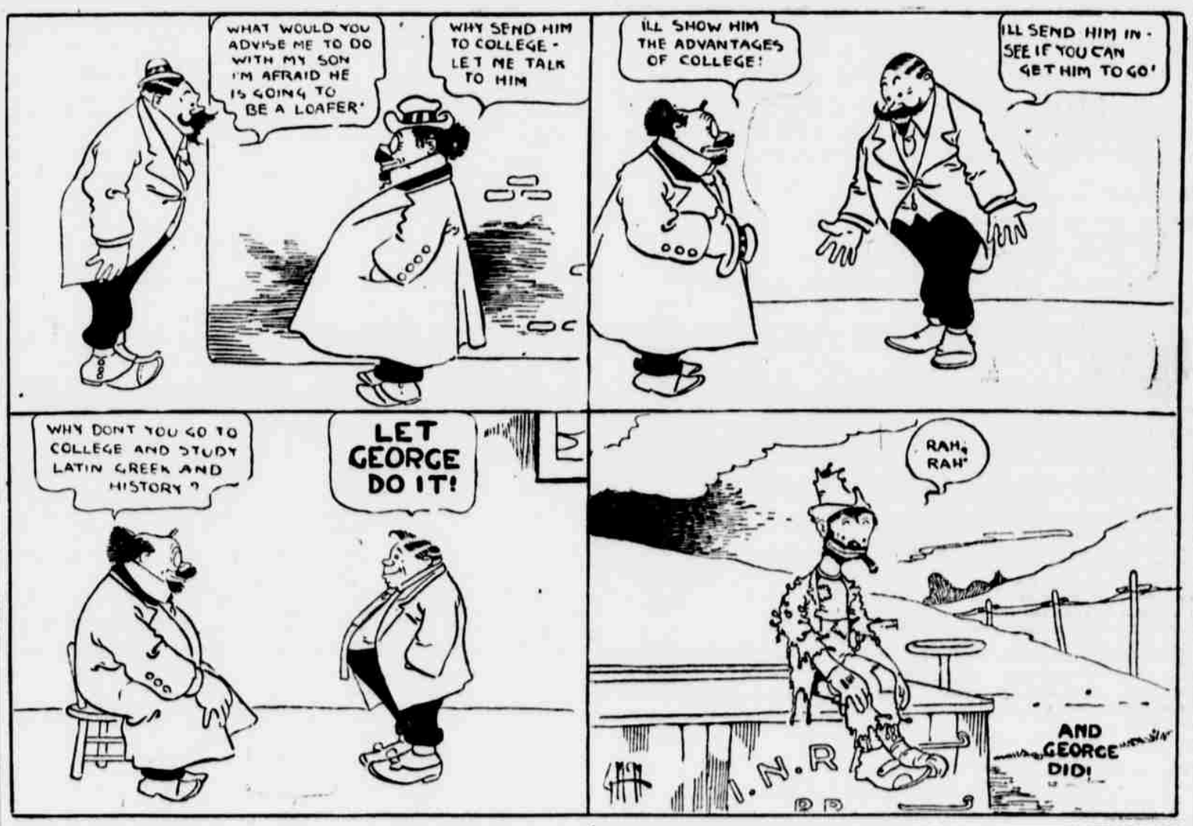

Dumbwaiter Dialogues

By Alma Woodward

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Hist! Call the Police!

Scene: Palisade Arms.
Characters: Mrs. Willis, Mrs. Nichols, Maggie and others.

MRS. WILLIS, hearing a slight noise in the dumbwaiter shaft, looks down and sees the waiter moving upward slowly, a man's arm protruding.

Mrs. W. (calling in a whisper to Mrs. N.)—Mrs. Nichols!

Mrs. N. (answering)—Well?

Mrs. W. (gesticulating graphically)—Don't say anything out loud, but I'm sure there's a burglar trying to get up on the waiter!

Mrs. N. (suppressing a little shriek)—Oh, what shall we do? Oh, I wish my husband was here!

Maggie (on the floor above)—Shure, what's all the row?

Duet—Sh! sh!

Mrs. N. (brilliantly)—Maggie, you know the policeman on this beat, don't you?

Maggie—Shure! He's me cousin on me uncle's side!

Mrs. N.—Well, you run down quickly and bring him up here. And hurry, Maggie, because the burglar may have a pistol or something!

Mrs. W. (cautiously)—He's moving very slowly. I guess he doesn't want to make any noise. I'll bet he's a desperate character! What ever would we do if he pulled the waiter up on a level with our floor? I'd drop dead, I know I would!

Mrs. N. (after a moment's thought)—I've got it! You get your ironing board and we'll put it across the shaft; then we'll hold down the ends, and when he gets up this far he'll be caught just like a rat in a trap.

Mrs. W. (admiringly)—I don't know how you can think out such a clever solution when you're scared to death. I know I couldn't.

(Mrs. W. gets the board and carries out instructions quietly. They stand grimly silent holding down the ends.)

Maggie (suddenly, in a hoarse whisper)—I've got 'em, Mrs. Nichols—two av 'em!

Policeman (eagerly)—Where is he?

Mrs. W.—Sh! sh! Don't make so much noise or he'll escape.

Mrs. N. (to men)—What are you going to do? It's an awfully difficult place to catch a burglar.

Policeman—We're going to pull him up sudden before he has a chance to get away. He won't take the chance of dropping thirty feet.

Mrs. W. (in terror)—Indeed, you're not going to pull him up past MY floor. He might shoot in at me!

Mrs. N.—If you want to pull him up come down to our floor. We don't want to take any chances.

Policeman (impatiently)—Well, if we spend much more time talking about it we won't have anything to pull up!

Mrs. W.—Come down right away then. I'll open my front door for you.

(Mrs. N., left alone at shaft, glances down furtively and to her horror sees waiter creeping up slowly.)

Maggie (shivering)—Is the villain there yet, Mrs. Nichols?

(The police and Mrs. W. appear at the other door.)

Policeman—What's this board doing here? (Throws it aside.) Now, Pat, altogether—one, two, three!

(With all the strenuousness they have not displayed in patrolling their beats, they pull the waiter up on a level with the floor.)

Policeman (whipping gun from hip pocket)—Now, me fine fellow, we've got ye red-handed!

Mrs. W. (in a hysterical little shriek)—Why, it's the janitor!

Mrs. W.—So it is!

Police—Well, I'll be——

Maggie (curiously)—An' what were ye doin' sittin' on the waiter, Timothy O'Flynn?

Janitor (meekly)—Greasin' the slides; they wus so dry.

Policeman (suggestively)—An' that's not the only thing that's dry around here!

Maggie (with sympathy)—An' after the thirsty walk ye're been taking! Maybe the ladies won't mind——

Policeman (gallantly)—Well, ladies, if you insist! (Lets go waiter rope suddenly.)

(There is a whirr, a gasp and a couple of feminine shrieks as the waiter shoots down the shaft—then a dull thud.)

Maggie (wildly)—Are ye killed, Timothy O'Flynn?

Janitor (afraid of being neglected)—Not unless it's dyin' from thirst I am!

Chorus—Oh!

Reflections of a Bachelor Girl

By Helen Rowland

HELEN ROWLAND.

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IN the end nobody finds life quite so flat as the rounder.

After all, the difference in husbands consists merely in the degree in which their wives happen to find them out.

A man always fancies that the best way to win in an argument with a woman is to kiss her and tell her how pretty she looks—and it usually is.

The way in which a woman works out a problem is as mysterious to a man as the way in which she works dough.

Funny how a husband and wife can cling together through tragedy, poverty, illness and sorrow and then fall out about a little thing like the possession of the morning newspaper.

Man's "infinite variety" consists entirely in the variety of his faults. If all men were perfect the world would be terribly monotonous.

Nothing makes a man feel so injured as to have his wife keep perfectly silent about something that he fully expected to be nagged about.

The difference between courtship and matrimony is something like the difference between listening to a "travelogue" and taking a trip abroad.

A little college is a dangerous thing—for a girl who wants to be a shining light in the matrimonial market.

Betty Vincent Gives Advice on Courtship and Marriage

The Home Girl.

BETTY VINCENT.

DEAR girls, stay at home. Do not listen to wild tales of fame and money to be earned out in the wide world. Make good in your own home before you begin to fancy you can conquer larger spheres.

I am prompted to these few lines by a letter I received to-day. It is written by a mother, and it reads:

"My girl knows a young man who is continually telling her of the financial advantages of the West. He has so fired her imagination she insists she will go West. And if she does it will break my heart."

So here is a suggestion for you, foolish girl. You cannot reach anything higher in this world by stepping on your mother's heart. Just forget the silly stories the young man has been telling and use your common sense. If you cannot succeed in your own home where every one knows you and makes allowances for you; where you are surrounded by your friends; how much chance do you think you would have among utter strangers? No, my dears; stay close to your mother and to her love just as long as you can.

Loves Him.

A GIRL, who signs her letter "L. M." writes:

"I am a young girl and all my friends tell me I am very pretty. I am in love with a man older than I am, but I do not think he cares for me. What can I do to gain his affection?"

If you cannot win his affection by behaving as a sweet, modest girl should there is no other way.

To a Restaurant.

A GIRL who signs her letter "T. M." writes:

"I have seen a young man every day for a couple of months, on the car. Yesterday he spoke to me and asked me to go to a restaurant with him. He seemed to be a nice young man, and as I work hard all day I would like to have a little fun in the evenings."

Dear little girl, of course you should not have permitted the young man to speak to you without an introduction. But inasmuch as you have done so, it would be far better to see him in your own home than to go to a restaurant with him. After a time, when your parents have met and approved of him, you might then accept his invitation to go out. I sympathize with your desire for "a little fun."

To a Dance.

A YOUNG man who signs his letter "Q. J. M." writes:

"I have been calling steadily on a girl, and the last time I called I asked her if she was going to a certain dance. She said 'No.' I went and saw her there with another man. What do you think?"

The young lady may simply have changed her mind. She may not have intended to say something untrue.

Another Man.

A YOUNG man who signs his letter "K. L." writes:

"I am in love with a girl and she says she loves me, but she persists in telling me all the time of another man who is devoted to her. Do you think she really cares for me?"

Probably she does, and only talks of the other man because she fancies it makes you jealous.